

Wild Love Preserve: A new paradigm for wild horses

BY RENEE AUCOIN

For those who may think that cattle ranchers, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), environmentalists and wild horse preservation activists have incompatible goals, a new paradigm has emerged in this part of Central Idaho.

Andrea Maki, founder and CEO of Wild Love Preserve (WLP), has successfully brought diametrically opposed stakeholders to the bargaining table where they've identified compatible goals and are working together to sustain wild horse populations while protecting ranchers' rights and ensuring environmental sustainability.

The numbers are prolific. According to BLM, there are about 40,600 wild horses and burros now compared to 25,300 in 1971 when the Wild Free Roaming Horse and Burro Act was passed. Wild horses have few natural predators and herd populations can double every five to six years.

Controversies surrounding wild horses and public land use are numerous, highlighting the conflict between ranchers, environmentalists, wild horse advocates and the federal government.

Idaho's public lands are home to over 775 wild horses in six herd management areas. In Challis, that's 154,500 acres with an Appropriate Management Level (AML) for 185 horses.

Stephen Bauchman is a local rancher with public land

grazing permits; is a member of local and state cattle associations and sits on the BLM Resource Advisory Committee overseeing projects on the eastern half of the state.

"The wild horse issue is a controversial one throughout the western states," Bauchman says. "The horse advocates believe they shouldn't be removed, while BLM is overburdened with unadoptable horses. They have allocated \$80.2 million in FY 2015 to manage the animals, which includes the cost of maintaining the captured herd, control actions and research on population control methods. The objection from the ranchers' standpoint is the impact on the range of 14,000 wild horses over the appropriate management level... most of which overlaps grazing allotments. As ranchers, we are assailed by environmental extremists to remove the cattle from the range due to drought, endangered species concerns or impacts on the water shed."

Kevin Lloyd, BLM Challis Field Office, agrees that ranchers and the government need to work together. "BLM is a 'multiple use agency. We have to balance out all of our uses out on the public lands. Not everybody agrees with everything that we do, but we try to balance everything."

Maki came into the picture after the 2009 gathering and expressed an interest to Lloyd about the Challis herd.

"We began talking to her really seriously in January-February 2012 and I've worked



Andrea Maki greets one of the horses her organization adopted recently. This critter, along with many others, are currently staying on the Karen Whitworth ranch north of Challis. *Renée Aucoin photos*

with her since," says Lloyd.

Not everything Maki wanted was conducive to wild horse management, Lloyd says. "But we've been able to find a lot of common ground." During one gathering she watched where helicopters were put in use. "She tried to talk to a lot of people and diffused the situation," Lloyd recalls. "One of the really nice things about Andrea is that she's always been really open with us and tried to keep that communication going without it being antagonistic. We've found a lot of common ground."

"WLP is truly the culmination of all the various paths that I've traveled for the past 47 years of my life," Maki says. "It's about finding a new way to bring people together. I believe that if you go into something looking for a fight, you're going to get a fight. If you approach with kindness and compassion and understanding and interest in listening to various perspectives, whether you agree with those perspectives or not, eventually people will come together and you will find common ground. I work with folks who I don't have the same beliefs necessarily on some fronts, but I find it very interesting and purposeful to listen to their history and their perspectives and take that into account as this project has evolved, whether it be the ranchers or BLM or the environmentalists."

Maki impressed Lloyd with her ability to get horses adopted. Of those gathered in the above-mentioned roundup, only 25 were adopted out through the normal process.



Raelene Adams and Steven Garman prepare to dart WLP wild horses with fertility drug PZP.

Bauchman is also impressed with Maki's achievements. "Andrea, through her organization, has faced obstacles greater than adoption and management. She has had to overcome the natural suspicion of the community and other public land users who have experienced disregard for social, economic and cultural concerns of the community. She has crafted an understanding with the community, ranchers and local government officials by demonstrating 'on the ground' solutions without government monies.

"We had a ranch in the Pahsimeroi with corrals, with modifications to meet BLM guidelines, to handle the approximately 100 horses she adopted from the recent Challis gather. With the assistance of local ranchers and outfitters they were transported from BLM facilities to the ranch. We

provided hay and a cowboy to manage and care for them. WLP raised funds and covered all expenses for modifications, transport, monthly lease and feed. This is the first occasion to our recollection that an advocate has used private funding to address a public land issue.

"Andrea has demonstrated that her program, when fully funded, will solve the wild horse issue in the Custer County wild horse management area. This will be done through private management and PZP population control for the herd... Her actions have quieted the naysayers in the agency and ranching communities."

A native of, and living in Seattle, Maki spends much of her time in the Challis area. "Since Wild Love Preserve originated in

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— Wild horse paradigm



Some of the horses in the Challis Herd Management Area a few years ago.
Todd Adams photo

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2010, I go back and forth all the time... My work has always reflected what I've referred to as the concept of 'one' and that we're all the same energy simply in different packages, but as two-legged, it's simply our responsibility to care for the 'whole.' We have an ability to care for the whole in a way that other species don't because we have the ability to communicate the way that we do. With the privilege comes a responsibility to act on behalf of the whole. We need to take care of each other and all things."

Maki acknowledges the difficulties in creating sustainable, protected herds of wild horses. "With WLP, the goal from the beginning has been to find an approach that could benefit all horses. We're in a place where

WLP is being viewed as a paradigm shift because we are addressing wild horses in the wild, in the Challis Herd Management Area, but then we are accounting for those horses that were removed, for example, from the 2012 roundup. In doing so, Idaho is in a position to be the first state that is addressing 'their own' at home, rather than shipping wild horses out of state to long-term holding facilities in other areas such as Oklahoma or Kansas City. We want to create a vested interest by the community, by the region, and by the state, in these treasured wild horses. In doing that and in benefiting the community, the horses that some have seen as a nuisance, are benefiting the community by bringing in new sources of revenue. Suddenly you have a shift from regional wild horses

being viewed as problematic and taking away to benefiting and enriching the community and the region and the state.

"All things are interconnected. It would be wonderful to think the wild horses could be out on 154,000 acres of the Challis Herd Management Area and not be touched or bothered. But the fact remains that [land] is multi-purpose, multi-use public land, and like it or not, this is about sharing. The reason why I was under the radar for the first 2.5 years is that we have these adverse factions with the environmentalists, the ranchers, the government, the locals and I was going about speaking with everybody, knocking on doors, and talking to folks one on one, to introduce myself and WLP, to

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see how they would respond. That's been really key, establishing communication and trust with various and all sides, all stakeholders."

After adopting over 100 horses in 2012, WLP had to pay for temporary corrals that met BLM standards and meet the monumental task of paying for feed, care and transportation.

"Then of course, when we are in town there's the trickle down effect of all the food that we purchase, or the gasoline, or the restaurants that we go to; other people coming to visit the

horses that bring in revenue to the community. We have partnered with outfitters so that that we can have our pack trips and ecotourism in play and that again has been a part of the grand scheme since 2010."

Maki connected with Stephen and Lyndella Bauchman in late 2012. They let WLP lease corrals and orchestrated modifications to meet BLM requirements. Horses from the 2012 and 2013 adoption were moved to the Bauchman's ranch until August of last year. Cliff Palmer and Raelene Adams fed and

cared for WLP horses for first the nine months "and were instrumental in the arrival of our 24 little ones from mares already pregnant."

The horses were then moved to Karen Whitworth's ranch north of Challis where they will stay until WLP finds a permanent location. "The idea was to get the horses turned out and onto their own wild expanse. We have that property secured but we have to pay for it, of course. Nothing is free," Maki is quick to remind.

The personal cost to Maki has been enormous, and not without sacrifice on her part. "I have an art career. I'm not looking to save horses for my ego. I'm looking to save these horses to protect the whole, because it matters in the big picture. I've put my career on hold, which is

my livelihood, for the last four years, for the horses. I didn't plan on that. The project has grown, and it's just required my attention 24/7. And so, I very much look forward to getting back in the studio once in a while."

Maki also is aware of the responsibilities. "At this point we've adopted 130 wild horses and we now have 126 to feed and to care for. We've pulled these horses out of the taxpayer system, and I have to raise the money. When someone doesn't keep their word on some big donation, I still have to come up with the money to pay the bills. I still have to find other options, whether loans, private loans, credit cards, whatever that is, I'm out front... At the end of the day, it's all on

my shoulders... at the end of the day, I'm the one footing the bill and figuring out how to pay for it all."

Maki has worked tirelessly on the funding for the permanent home for WLP and is grateful for the support of the local community. "Once we get our two properties secured, which needs to happen immediately, we can get our adopted horses moved back to native range, and put our eco-tourism into hi-gear. My every day is spent raising funds to take care of the horses, getting money to the people like Karen. I've got some ranchers who've run hay tabs for us. No words can fully express how appreciative I am that they are trusting me."